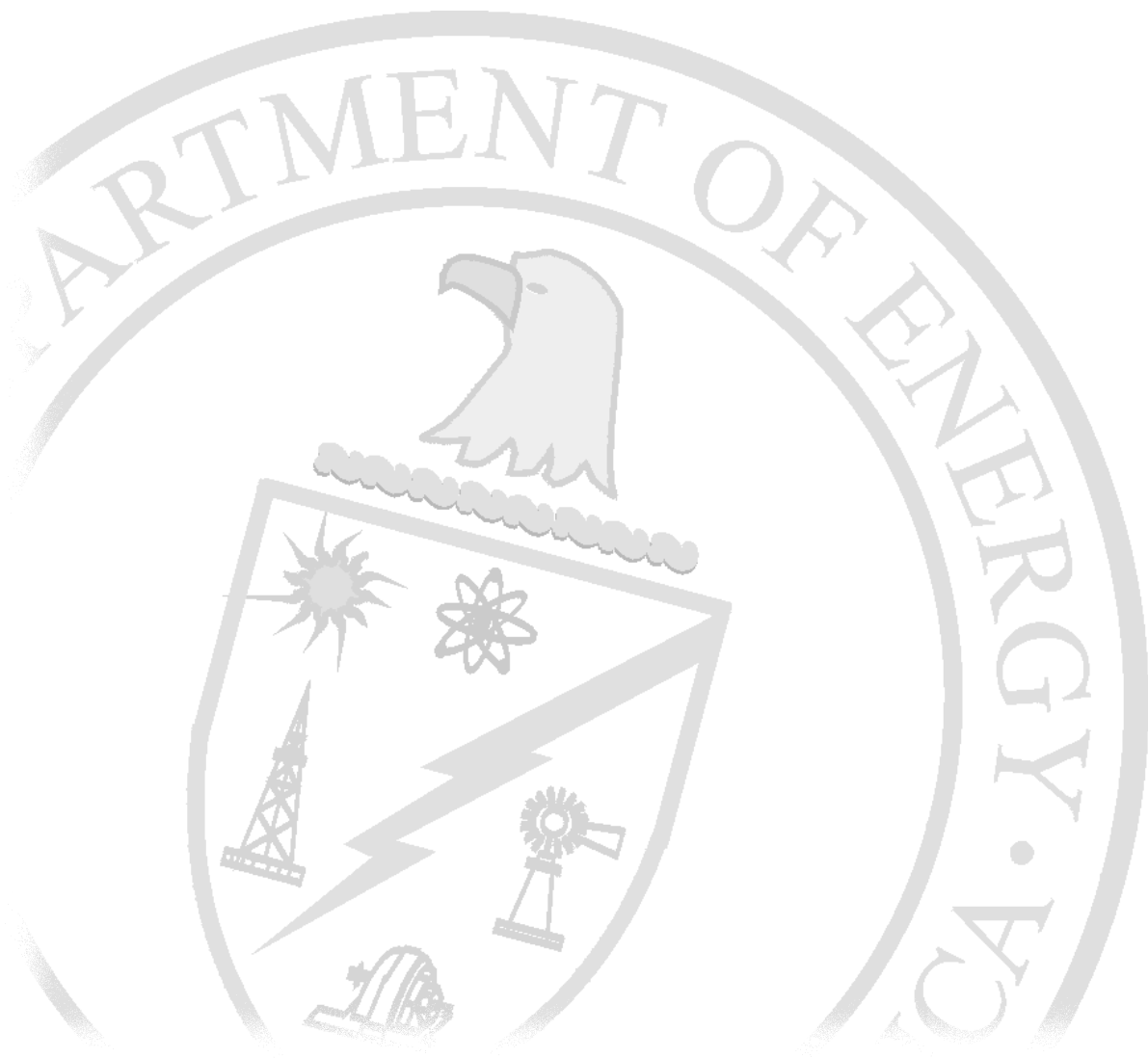


# Practice 9

## Communications and Stakeholder Participation





# 9 COMMUNICATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

## 9.1 OVERVIEW

The goal of a public participation plan is to align project and public interests so that project decisions reflect community concerns. To ensure the proper level of public participation, planning should begin early, during the project's conceptual phase, so that public participation can be integrated with the decision-making process throughout the project.

To ensure consistency and the most efficient use of public participation resources, the project manager must coordinate all public participation activities through the DOE Headquarters Office of Public Affairs or its counterpart in the field. The Public Affairs staff is experienced in communicating effectively with the public and can help the project manager use existing mechanisms for public participation to gain public input. Such coordination may include consulting with other project managers involved in ongoing public participation activities (e.g., public participation coordinators for Environmental Management projects). This guidance explains how public participation works within the project; however, the project manager should rely on Public Affairs to direct the effort.

In implementing this guidance, the project manager must understand and enact the intent of DOE P 1210.1, Public Participation, which describes the Department's goals and core values for enlisting public input on project decisions.

Accordingly, public participation plans may be tailored to a site or to a specific project. The site-integrated plan covers all project activities at a site. Although small and/or medium-sized projects may be incorporated into the site-integrated plan, a large project (as defined by cost or project duration) may require its own plan. This guidance both lists and explains the minimum components recommended for an effective project-specific communications and stakeholder participation plan, but the principles might be applied to a site-integrated plan as well.

Various communications and stakeholder participation requirements are imposed by the following laws which should be reviewed by the project manager to determine their applicability:

- ▶ Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) as revised by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA)
- ▶ Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)
- ▶ National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

## 9.2 PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES

In the past, many public participation programs relied on one-way communication. Officials used presentations, brochures, press releases, and other public information tools to prepare the government's side of the story without inviting public comment. That is no longer the case.

Besides being required in many cases by law, citizens often demand a voice in how, and sometimes if, a project will be carried out. When stakeholders don't have the opportunity to participate, they are much more likely to resist and oppose a project, which can present a serious obstacle to success. When people are allowed to participate in and affect the decision-making process, they are more likely to accept the outcome. In addition, they may be able to share information that increases the likelihood of project success.

Over the course of a project, public attention and interest in the project can change in focus and intensity. The project must establish communications channels through activities that provide the greatest flexibility in reaching audiences and avoid continual creation of new programs. Communications should be based on the project's goals and the need or desire for segments of the public to be involved. Communications tools or activities that when, once established, can be used to address changing messages, issues, and audiences, provide the best opportunity to conduct clear, accurate communications in a cost-efficient manner.

## 9.3 THE PUBLIC'S ROLE IN DECISION MAKING

Interest in community issues varies widely. Some individuals or groups are intensely interested and will devote considerable time and energy to learning about

issues and participating in decisions. Other participate occasionally. Others do not participate at all.

Effective public participation should be tailored so that individuals can participate at their level of interest. Accordingly, public participation plans should provide a variety of opportunities for participation. For the most active members of the public, such activities can include participation in citizen's boards, public meetings and hearings, and one-on-one meetings with project representatives or Public Affairs officers. Less active individuals can be reached through news releases, news conferences, community newsletters, and direct mailings. Such opportunities are discussed in Section 9.6, Public Participation Tool Box.

When overall public interest in project decisions is extremely high or the project is controversial, project managers should be especially mindful of keeping the public informed about the project, including opportunities for participation throughout the decision-making process.

Effective communications and stakeholder participation is especially important when a project generates high levels of public interest or is likely to be controversial. Existing public participation programs provide excellent insight into issues that generate public concern. Examples of such issues include:

- ▶ Release of contaminants to air or water
- ▶ Transportation of hazardous materials or materials perceived to be hazardous
- ▶ Public and worker safety and health
- ▶ Future use of a facility
- ▶ Cleanup progress
- ▶ Budget and costs
- ▶ Public involvement, public information, and communication.

The above issues can raise public interest or concern and should be addressed accordingly. Any project with implications concerning safety and health, the use of tax dollars, reduction in the number of jobs, reduction in the value of real estate—any marked change in the status quo—is likely to generate public concern, thus making an effective communications and stakeholder participation program necessary. In addition, the following elements should be considered in gauging the amount of controversy associated with a project:

1. Do advocacy groups already exist for particular outcomes, either within a site or among stakeholders? Such advocates, either internal or external, are likely to generate controversy in an effort to ensure their preferred outcome prevails. In such instances, a forum should be provided so that these individuals, and others with different opinions, can debate their ideas in an effort to resolve the issues.
2. Is the decision primarily a technical choice or does it require one public concern to be weighed against another? Decisions that are primarily technical usually require minimal public involvement. Decisions that require choices between public concerns are more likely to generate interest and controversy.
3. Managers should make informed judgements about which level of activity is appropriate by consulting Public Affairs, other managers who have conducted similar communications and stakeholder participation programs, and major stakeholders who can provide insight into the level of public interest.

#### 9.4 COMMUNICATIONS STAFF

Although dynamic communications and stakeholder participation programs add to the duties of project managers, most of this effort should be assumed by the communications staff. During the conceptual phase, the project manager should request that a communications staff member be assigned to the project. This individual, whose job is to translate technical ideas into public information, works with the project manager to develop communications plans (see Attachment 1, Sample Communications Plan). This individual should also develop and maintain project-specific summaries of community concerns, based on the ongoing communications and stakeholder participation process.

Communications counselors also help ensure the timely dissemination of factual information to federal, state, and local officials, key stakeholders, educators, the media, and special interest groups, as well as the public.

General communications services include:

- ▶ Management of media relations
- ▶ Development of written materials (fact sheets, newsletters, etc.) that provide technical, engineering, or environmental information to the public
- ▶ Web site development and maintenance
- ▶ Graphic design, video production, and photography services

- ▶ Review of technical documents for community concerns
- ▶ Public opinion research
- ▶ Employee communication
- ▶ Emergency public information
- ▶ Community outreach
- ▶ Training in public speaking and risk communication.

## 9.5 COMMUNICATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION PLAN

Good timing is essential to the successful integration of public participation with the project's decision-making process. If the public does not have the opportunity to provide early input, their information may be received too late to be used effectively, leading them to believe that their interests have been ignored. On the other hand, if they are asked for input too soon, before the project and related decisions are adequately defined, the public may feel their input is meaningless. Either way, the DOE may lose credibility.

For these reasons, it is important to establish the communications and stakeholder participation plan early in the project. The plan should be updated annually to reflect changes in the project and the decision process—and public input.

The plan should define project goals for public participation and may include compliance with laws and regulations. The National Environmental Policy Act, for example, requires that procedures be developed to ensure the “fullest practicable provision of timely public information and the understanding of Federal plans and programs with environmental impact to obtain the views of interested parties.” Additional goals include responding to specific community issues, such as land use and health concerns. In so doing, the project manager can seek to reduce or eliminate costly delays caused by public objections. To meet such goals, the communications and stakeholder participation plan should include the level of public involvement needed, the specific interest groups that should be consulted, and the time frame required.

The decision-making process for a particular project or project activity may be simple or complex, but the basic steps of public involvement consist of the fol-

lowing that should be used to develop a communication and stakeholder participation plan, such as to

- ▶ conduct a community assessment.
- ▶ consult the public.
- ▶ identify potential alternatives that deal with public concerns.
- ▶ inform stakeholders of the alternatives being considered.
- ▶ evaluate and refine the alternatives.
- ▶ present the alternatives to the public.
- ▶ make a decision.
- ▶ evaluate progress continuously and revise the plan accordingly.

### **9.5.1 Conduct Community Assessment**

Community assessments, which are prepared by Communications, identify the public issues most likely to affect the success of the project and the stakeholder groups most likely to participate in—or object to—the decision-making process.

The community assessment, described below, is an invaluable resource during the project. In addition to discussing the structure of the community, the profile may describe

- ▶ how the community has reacted to the site in the past.
- ▶ what citizen actions have been taken.
- ▶ how DOE's approach to communications and stakeholder participation has changed over the years.
- ▶ how the community regards the risks posed by the site, focusing on the perceptions of past events and problems.

#### **Identify Stakeholders**

The term stakeholder refers to people who are interested in a project decision because of their proximity, economic interest, use of mandate or authority; or their vulnerability to environmental, socioeconomic, or cultural impacts.



Stakeholders may be part of one of more of the following groups:

- ▶ U.S. EPA
- ▶ U.S. DOT
- ▶ Native American Tribal Governments
- ▶ State governments
- ▶ Local governments
- ▶ Elected officials
- ▶ Environmental groups
- ▶ Industry and professional organizations
- ▶ Labor organizations
- ▶ Education groups
- ▶ Citizens groups
- ▶ Educational groups
- ▶ Community members

Communications and stakeholder plans should identify which stakeholders are most likely to take an interest in project decisions and commit their time and resources to participate in these decisions. The plan should link specific stakeholder group(s) with specific technical issues, objectives, and/or other significant features of the project. This information can be used to plan for the participation of that group during project implementation, including the timing of their participation, and the size, type, and cost of related activities.

### **Identify Issues Likely to Affect the Public**

To obtain the participation of all major stakeholders, issues should be identified at a level that does not automatically rule out the options they believe should be considered. For that reason, the first step in the communications and stakeholder participation plan may be the initiation of a Citizens Advisory Board to obtain an initial list of the public's concerns. Communications will be instrumental in the success of this effort and can provide valuable information, including public opinion research and community profiles.

If the project manager chooses not to consult with opinion leaders, the team would have to develop alternatives by starting with known technical approaches and combining them in various ways. The project team might be able to decide on one alternative, but by working in isolation from the public would be likely to pre-judge major value issues in favor of technical solutions, perhaps failing to account for public concerns. When the team works with various stakeholders, however, they are more likely to consider a broader range of alternatives. In fact, the range of choices may be too broad to allow detailed technical evaluation of each alternative, but stakeholders are far more likely to support the process if they can see that the alternatives considered reflect their concerns.

Typical public issues may include long-term safety, short-term risks, on-site disposal requirements, the impact on natural resources, transportation and off-site disposal requirements, economic impacts and benefits, and cost.

### **9.5.2 Consult the Public**

The communications and stakeholder participation plan should recognize that once the issues are identified and various alternatives are under consideration, the project manager, in concert with communications personnel, should publicly announce the various options and seek comments. Depending on the level of public interest, the best avenue for this discussion may be a Citizens Task Force, a public meeting or hearing, or an announcement in the newsletter with an invitation for comment. At this time, the public may suggest additional alternatives or ways to modify existing alternatives to make them more acceptable. The public may also provide reasons for rejecting certain alternatives. This step may more fully define existing alternatives or extend the list further.

### **9.5.3 Identify Potential Alternatives that Deal with Public Concerns**

To maintain credibility and ensure selection of the best alternative among a range of options, the evaluation process should be as objective as possible, taking into consideration the technical and economic feasibility of alternatives while describing the social, economic, and environmental impacts that would result from each. These impacts should be described so that they are technically verifiable.

Because the number of alternatives may be too great to allow detailed evaluation of each one, this evaluation may necessarily be a rough cut. Based on this rough-cut evaluation, the project team may determine that some alternatives are not

feasible technically, have too many unacceptable impacts, or are unacceptable to the public. Accordingly, unacceptable alternatives are eliminated and the possibilities reduced to a number that can be reasonably studied in greater detail.

Determining which alternatives are best is not always easy for the public, or even decision makers. The best alternative for one group may not be the best for another. Cost may be the project manager's primary consideration, for example, while jobs may be the public's primary concern. When the project manager is faced with such choices, public participation is especially important in determining the range of acceptable choices, even though one choice will not please everyone.

#### **9.5.4 Inform Stakeholders of the Alternatives Being Considered**

Again, projects managers should use the various public information tools to inform stakeholders and the public what alternatives are being considered, the criteria used to discard some, and retain those most promising. The public can offer additional input to help the project team further evaluate and refine the alternatives.

#### **9.5.5 Evaluate and Refine the Alternatives**

Most effective decision-making processes go through several iterations. Each time, some alternatives are eliminated and some are added. With each iteration, the alternatives are defined to a greater level of detail in an effort to select the alternative that best suits the technical and cost needs of the project, while recognizing the public's values.

In making these determinations, the project team and Communications should answer the following questions:

1. What evaluation methodology should be used?
2. Are alternatives consistent with stakeholder concerns?
3. Can the alternatives be modified or combined to better accommodate the various factors affecting decision?
4. Is more information needed to make the decision?

5. If a public concern changed for some reason, would the choice of the alternatives be affected?
6. Is more than one course of action acceptable if the situation changes or if new information makes the first choice unacceptable?

### **9.5.6 Present Alternatives to the Public**

Once again, the public participation plan should provide for a public forum to discuss the alternatives. If uncertainties about the alternatives still exist, they should be honestly presented with some estimate of the time required for resolution. At this point, the schedule should allow for further changes.

### **9.5.7 Make the Decision**

In the end, the project manager is responsible for the decision. Obviously, public participation cannot dictate the decision; even the best public participation programs involve only a small percentage of the public. However, when stakeholders care enough to participate in the decision-making process, their participation should mean something, or they will be more upset than if they had not been asked to participate in the first place. For that reason, it is important that the project manager and the project team work to ensure that the public understands how their concerns were considered. Once again, some public forum must be provided to announce the final decision, along with a clear explanation of the process used to make the decision, the criteria used, and the impact of the decision on stakeholder interests.

### **9.5.8 Evaluate Progress Continuously and Review the Plan Accordingly**

Throughout the project, the project team should evaluate decisions as described above, in addition to re-evaluating decisions already made, so that they recognize and take advantage of any opportunity to accommodate the public.

The evaluation process can be difficult. For one thing, many of the benefits of a communications and stakeholder participation program are intangible and therefore subjective and difficult to measure. For another, the benefits of one public participation activity depend to some extent on the success of other related public participation activities; the credibility established by one group or during one activity may affect another.

## 9.6 COMMUNICATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION TOOL BOX

### 9.6.1 Public Meetings and Formal Public Hearings

Public meetings provide a two-way exchange between the public and DOE. Public meetings may include a panel of DOE or independent speakers, informal discussions with speakers, exhibits, and a question-and-answer period. Public meetings can also include smaller sessions with technical personnel. Providing video/satellite conferencing for those unable to travel to the meeting and holding evening meetings are ways to encourage participation in public meetings.

As opposed to public meetings, public hearings follow a more prescribed format and are usually held to fulfill the requirements of laws, regulations, or legal agreements and may be convened by DOE or a regulating agency (EPA, etc.). Hearings provide a formal record of public comments on a specific regulatory document for permit application.

Public meetings and public hearings are very visible and for that reason potentially problematic. Depending on the issue and the public's level of interest, the meeting may be well-attended by both the public and the media. If the project is controversial, the meeting may be volatile. For these reasons, Communications should plan and direct the meeting to help anticipate problems and plan solutions, including innovative approaches that will enhance the exchange of information.

Regularly scheduled public meetings provide for ongoing involvement and discussions of a wide range of topics. Over time, monthly or quarterly meetings foster development of mutual respect and understanding while expanding the information base of both the members of the public and the project.

### 9.6.2 Citizens Groups

Citizen groups can include a variety of possibilities, such as roundtable discussion groups, work or technical review committees, or Citizen Advisory Groups. Such groups can be established for a specific project, or the project manager can work with groups already established at the site. Such groups are regulated by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA, Public law 92-468). The project manager should be familiar with and ensure compliance with this act.

The single most important component for success for the citizens groups is a sincere commitment by DOE and its contractors to seriously consider the group's

recommendations. Citizens groups can provide independent recommendations on key project decisions, but all levels of management must be willing to work directly with a Citizens Task Force and its members. Managers who do not understand the significance of public participation should receive additional training to prepare them for the process. Credibility and trust is most often lost at the working level by managers or engineers who send messages that public input is not important or wanted.

A Citizens Task Force provides real public participation, which may increase public understanding and acceptance of the issues while providing DOE decision-makers with insight. Such a group can help the project manager focus on issues that may be lost in the project decision-making process and require significant local involvement. The Citizens Task Force also provides ready access to a knowledgeable group of stakeholders who can act as a sounding board for important and sensitive issues. Finally, a Citizens Task Force can informally disseminate information to the public.

Members understand that they represent the demographics and socioeconomic conditions surrounding the facility. Members should be encouraged to recognize and understand the groups most likely to identify with them and work to ensure those groups are informed of and involved in board activities.

Although it can represent a full range of public concerns, the Citizens Task Force cannot possibly represent everyone. The Citizens Task Force is not the only stakeholder group that DOE listens to; and the group does not replace any part of a public participation program, but enhances the effectiveness of direct public involvement in decision-making.

### **9.6.3 Prompt, Factual, Accurate Responses to Inquiries**

Whenever members of the public or news media have questions or express concerns regarding site developments, events, cleanup plans, and progress; they have presented DOE with an excellent opportunity to increase the public's understanding and gain favor for the project. The project manager should plan in advance for such inquiries, working with Communications and preparing the technical staff to respond quickly, preferably within 24 hours.

#### **9.6.4 Printed Materials**

Printed materials include newsletters, fact sheets, and community and employee publications that provide updates on key activities and events at the site and promote public involvement.

#### **9.6.5 Additional Public Information Tools**

A number of other tools are available to the project manager, including

- ▶ web sites on project activities
- ▶ exhibits at public events
- ▶ speakers bureau to disseminate information to community organizations
- ▶ open house and regular tours of the facility
- ▶ mailings to stakeholders and other community members notifying them of public comment periods or the availability of documents
- ▶ videotapes to provide information on project accomplishments
- ▶ public reading rooms
- ▶ educational activities such as mentoring, internship, and school-to-work programs

### **9.7 MEASURING FOR RESULTS**

During the course of the decision-making process, the project manager may want to quantify comments as a means of evaluating alternatives. Such analysis may provide useful information in determining prevailing public concerns, but it should not take the place of sustained public outreach.

At appropriate intervals, depending on the size of the project and the level of public interest, project managers need to conduct evaluations of their public participation programs. Local colleges or universities may be helpful in gathering community opinions and information for a project. Upfront relationships must be established with these groups; however, before they are enlisted to support a project in such an effort.

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# Attachment 1

## SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

### **West Valley Demonstration Project Stakeholder Communications Plan for FY2000**

#### GOAL

The WVDP's goal is to achieve its waste and environmental management objectives as established in the West Valley Demonstration Project Act (Public Law 96-368) in accordance with agreements with involved agencies and organizations. As a responsible member of the local community this requires the WVDP to:

- ▶ Provide current, accurate Project information to the public and, specifically, to interested stakeholders
- ▶ Respond to stakeholder requests
- ▶ Solicit, collect, and consider stakeholder input as part of decision-making.

#### WVDP COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH

WVDP communications is based on meeting the needs of the many individuals and organizations that are interested Project stakeholders. Communications planning is focused on developing and maintaining channels of communication throughout the community, through which information can be disseminated, input can be received, and responses to requests can be provided.

Communications activities are conducted:

- ▶ On a proactive basis to provide information and/or solicit input and involvement
- ▶ In response to stakeholder requests.

Whether proactive or responsive, communications must meet stakeholders' needs in terms of content and timing.



## RESPONSIBILITIES

The success of the WVDP communications program depends on the integrated participation of personnel from the Department of Energy, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) project offices, and West Valley Nuclear Services Co. (WVNS).

The organizations' responsibilities are:

► ***West Valley Nuclear Services***

The WVNS Public & Employee Communications Department is responsible for planning, organizing, conducting, and evaluating the WVDP's communications activities.

WVNS technical and administrative personnel are responsible for providing the support needed to conduct the planned activities.

► ***Department of Energy***

Project office staff are responsible for working with involved stakeholders to achieve the Department's WVDP goals.

► ***New York State Energy Research and Development Authority***

The NYSERDA owns the Western New York Nuclear Service Center where the WVDP is located. Authority personnel are responsible for conducting stakeholder communications regarding certain current and long-term Center management issues for which the NYSERDA is responsible.

## COMMUNICATIONS FOCUS FOR 2000

Communications initiatives in FY2000 will continue to focus on providing information to stakeholders on near-term and long-term work and related WVDP completion issues, and will continue to encourage stakeholder involvement and open discussion.

Key work scopes that will be discussed include:

- Remote cleaning of the high-level waste tanks
- Development of a draft preferred alternative for WVDP completion and long-term site management

- ▶ Decontamination and decommissioning of portions of the former spent fuel reprocessing plant
- ▶ Low-level waste shipping for disposal
- ▶ Preparations for shipment of spent nuclear fuel
- ▶ Design and construction of the Remote-Handled Waste Facility.

## PLANNED COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES FOR 2000

Historically, stakeholder surveys have proven to be valuable communications tools. Based on the input from the stakeholder survey conducted in 1998 and after consideration of past effectiveness, flexibility, and cost of the various activities, the following primary activities are planned for FY2000:

### ▶ *Stakeholder Survey*

Following on the successful results obtained from the 1998 stakeholder survey, we plan to conduct another survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes in communications activities.

*Required by*—Best Management Practice.

*Stakeholder involvement*—Members of the local community, schools, elected officials, businesses, participants from the Citizen Task Force and the West Valley Coalition on Nuclear Wastes, the Seneca Nation, and regulatory points of contact.

*Participation*—38 stakeholders.

*Value/Justification*—Obtaining direct knowledge of stakeholders' level of understanding of site activities and communications is vitally important to the successful execution of Project objectives. Feedback regarding Project activities and mission makes it possible to identify areas for improvement and initiate specific corrective actions.

### ▶ *Quarterly Public Meetings*

Meetings are held at the Ashford Office Complex in Ashford, N.Y., from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. and are tentatively scheduled for:

December 7, 1999	June 20, 2000
March 21, 2000	September 19, 2000

*Required by*—1987 Stipulation of Compromise Settlement (Civil No. 86-1052-C) between the Department of Energy and the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes.

*Stakeholder involvement*—Open to the general public. Representatives of the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes, Town of Ashford Board, local media and interested area residents routinely attend.

*Attendance*—15 to 35 people.

*Public Notification*—Personal postcards announcing each meeting are sent to regular attendees and key community representatives. Public notices in local newspapers, Penny Savers, WVDP employee newsletter.

*Value/Justification*—Initiated in 1987, the meetings are open forums to address changing issues and provide routine updates on Project progress. Minimal cost and ongoing attendance by local officials and interested residents make the meetings an excellent means of involving stakeholders.

► ***Citizen Task Force***

In January 1997, NYSERDA, with the support of the DOE, convened a Citizen Task Force (CTF) to provide recommendations regarding completion of the WVDP by DOE, and closure and/or long-term management of the site by NYSERDA.

The CTF is comprised of 16 Western New York residents invited to take part based on their involvement in a wide range of area organizations and groups. CTF members are associated with environmental and civic groups, educational organizations, and business organizations, in addition to representing elected offices and the Seneca Nation of Indians.

Twice monthly meetings were held through July 1998. At the July 29, 1998, meeting the CTF completed their recommendations report on WVDP completion and site closure and/or long-term management, and submitted it to DOE and NYSERDA. The CTF continues to meet to receive updates on EIS-related activities on an as-needed basis.

*Required by*—Best Management Practice.

*Stakeholder involvement*—Task Force members, general public, media.

*Attendance*—10 to 20 people.

*Public notification*—Pre-meeting mailings are sent to all Task Force members and interested stakeholders that have asked to receive them. Because meetings are scheduled on an as-requested basis, public notices are placed in the local paper. Meetings are frequently covered by the local Springville, NY weekly newspaper.

*Value/Justification*—The CTF was formed following evaluation of public comments received on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Numerous stakeholders commented on the complexity of the issues and the subsequent challenge in comparing alternatives. The CTF is one means of helping local stakeholders better understand the study and the issues involved. The recommendations report that has been submitted not only identifies key issues of community concern, but also provides a basis for discussions between involved stakeholders and the WVDP as a preferred alternative that will be developed over the coming year.

► ***Spent Nuclear Fuel Shipping***

In the coming year, considerable effort will be spent developing a plan for communications activities associated with shipping the 125 remaining spent fuel assemblies to the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory in 2001. In addition to the development of the Communications Plan, meetings with state points-of-contact along the transportation corridor will be initiated, outlining both the shipping project and communications activities.

► ***Open House***

Although the date and format have not been identified, Open House 2000 will continue to focus on tours and informational materials that allow visitors to view the WVDP facilities first-hand. Emphasis remains on interim projects that will bridge activities in anticipation of a preferred alternative and decisions about long-term site management.

*Required by*—Best Management Practice.

*Stakeholder involvement*—General public, Western New York schools, employees' families/friends/associates, interested/involved stakeholders and media.

*Attendance*—Over the history of the WVDP attendance has ranged from approximately 600 visitors to 1,800 visitors.

*Public notification*—Press release, posters, bulk mailing to local residents (4,500), advertisements in western New York newspapers/penny savers, special

mailing to interested stakeholders outside the local area.

*Value/Justification*—Public and media responses have been overwhelmingly positive throughout the years. Results from the stakeholder survey conducted in 1998 showed that Open House is an activity that appeals to a wide range of people and which participants feel is very informative.

In addition, media coverage of the event provides the opportunity to disseminate information to the general public, thus reaching many people in addition to Open House visitors.

► ***Local Chambers of Commerce***

Public and Employee Communications staff attend monthly meetings of the West Valley and Springville Chambers of Commerce to share information with local business leaders on Project and community activities and issues. As appropriate, the Project participates in community related functions of the chambers.

*Required by*—Best Management Practice.

*Stakeholder involvement*—Local business owners, site neighbors, elected officials, members of key community organizations.

*Attendance*—25 to 30 people.

*Value/Justification*—Monthly meetings are informal and provide opportunity for open dialogue. Featured topics cover the range of local issues and activities providing valuable information to the WVDP on community concerns, as well as providing area leaders routine access to WVDP information. Contacts with many local residents are developed, establishing channels for future communications.

► ***Public Reading Files***

The Public & Employee Communications Department maintains files of key WVDP documents in five locations (four area libraries and at a WVDP facility) to provide the public with open access to information.

*Required by*—DOE and regulatory guidance.

*Stakeholder involvement*—Three public reading files are located within 10 miles of the WVDP to meet the needs of residents in the local area. The other two reading files are in the major population centers north (Buffalo, N.Y.) and south (Olean, N.Y.) of the WVDP.

*Value/Justification*—Document files maintained in public libraries are a very inexpensive means of assuring basic WVDP information is available to the general public.

► ***Educational Programs***

Maximizing WVDP value to the local community has always been a Project goal. The establishment of an educational partnership between the WVDP and area schools is an example of this approach in action.

Two programs that will continue in the 1999-2000 school year are the Educational Horizons Work/Study Program and the Mentoring Program.

The Horizons Program was developed to take advantage of the wide range of technical and administrative disciplines at the WVDP to help students in their senior year make career choices and encourage them to further their education after high school.

Involved students work at the WVDP in situations which match their career interests. The work assignments are integrated into the students' school schedules, with most students at the Project for about eight hours each week. Through the WVDP/West Valley Central School partnership, additional private businesses are now taking part and will provide assignments for two students this year.

The Mentoring Program was begun in the 1994-95 school year and brings adult mentors into the school to meet and work with junior and senior high students on a weekly basis.

Students offered the chance to take part are selected by school staff based on the potential value of additional support and assistance to their success in school. They meet once a week in school with their adult mentor.

In the 1999-2000 school year, the mentoring program will be offered at Springville Middle School as well as Saint Aloysius in Springville and West Valley Central School. The WVDP will continue, in cooperation with the West Valley Central School Partnering Committee, to focus on soliciting the involvement of other area businesses to provide more opportunities for students.

*Required by*—Best Management Practice.

*Stakeholder involvement*—Three students are enrolled in the Horizons Program and 27 employees are participating in the Mentoring Program for the 1999-2000 school year.

*Value/Justification*—The programs provide opportunities in a rural area that would not be available to local students without the WVDP’s participation. At a very minimal cost, students benefit through enhancement of their education, and WVDP employees expand their perspective on the importance of the WVDP to the community and develop their interpersonal skills.

## ROUTINE COMMUNICATIONS FUNCTIONS

The following activities are conducted to respond to public requests. The WVDP Public & Employee Communications Department will continue to fulfill these responsibilities.

- ▶ Responses to Public and Media Information Requests  
— More than 200 annually
- ▶ Site Tours and Briefings  
— 30 to 60 annually
- ▶ Off-site Presentations for Educational and Community Organizations

### ***WVDP Stakeholders***

- ▶ Citizen Task Force (CTF)
- ▶ Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes (CWWNV)
- ▶ Seneca Nation of Indians
- ▶ Government: New York State, Cattaraugus and Erie County, Towns of Ashford and Concord
- ▶ Regulatory agencies: NRC, EPA Region II, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, NYS Department of Health
- ▶ Regional residents
- ▶ Local media
- ▶ National media—spent fuel shipping campaign
- ▶ Employees

### ***Current Public Affairs Environment***

Many of the public outreach activities performed over the last year have maintained, and in a number of areas improved, relations with members of the local community. The Project continues to provide support to the community through

educational programs, participation in local chambers of commerce, and various information sharing activities. In the Western New York region, the Project is currently experiencing a period of strong public acceptance.

### ***Analysis***

During the first ten years of the Project there was interest throughout the Western New York community in the WVDP. Initially there was general fear of the site due to misconceptions that had developed over nearly two decades of a “closed door” policy. After the WVDP “opened the doors” and alleviated many public fears, stakeholders focused on the real issue of safely solidifying the very radioactive liquid high-level waste. By 1993-94, the vitrification system had been developed, thoroughly tested, and as final preparations for vitrification operations proceeded public concern and attention became somewhat dormant.

By the time actual processing began in 1996, there were no public concerns voiced and it was very difficult to garner media coverage in Western New York after the initial startup of the facility. The West Valley site had faded from public awareness.

This general public calm and acceptance can be deceptive. When the public and the media are presented the plan for completing the WVDP and managing the site for the long-term, the West Valley “story” will be “new” again. The issues of long-term environmental dangers, regional equity, institutional controls, and state versus federal responsibilities all are issues that can incite negative public reactions and can become social obstacles to completing Project activities.

For example, when DOE began planning cleanup at the Tonawanda FUSRAP site, DOE held public meetings to discuss proposed alternatives. When DOE announced that the preferred alternative was to perform partial excavation and dispose of the material on site, the public was not satisfied. Due to strong public objections, the preferred alternative was changed to partial excavation and off-site disposal. Significant delays resulted.

We have identified this potential and have increased outreach activities to include a larger audience to prevent this kind of negative result. Following is a list of activities that were targeted in fiscal year 1999.

#### **► *Stakeholder Survey***

The WVDP has always worked to provide opportunities for open communications all interested stakeholders. The stakeholder survey was conducted to



collect feedback from individuals that have actively participated in communications programs. Questions were developed to gather stakeholders' input on the following specific topics: WVDP mission performance, the overall communications program, and specific WVDP communications activities.

There were two primary goals in gathering the information. The first goal was to determine general stakeholder satisfaction with WVDP operations. The second goal was to gather stakeholder input on specific communications activities to determine the relative value of each and identify possible areas of improvement.

Individuals were selected that actively participated in one or more of the WVDP outreach activities. Individuals were chosen from the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Waste, the Seneca Nation of Indians, West Valley Central School Parent/Teacher organization, West Valley and Springville Chambers of Commerce, area elected officials, West Valley Volunteer Hose Company, League of Women Voters, area news organizations, Cattaraugus County Industrial Development Agency, Environmental Management Council, Department of Environment and Planning, area residents, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Department of Environmental Conservation, and the West Valley Citizen Task Force. Information about the surveys was mailed to 38 individuals. Follow-up phone calls were placed to arrange face-to-face interviews at the interviewees convenience and choice of location. All information was kept confidential.

As indicated earlier, the Project seems to be enjoying a period of strong public acceptance. In general, the survey results corroborate the current community relations environment. A summary of the results follows:

Mission Performance—Overwhelming favorable responses for vitrification operations; somewhat less favorable responses for the Environmental Impact Statement-related performance.

Overall Communications—Consistently positive responses regarding the effectiveness and availability of Project information and management.

Specific Communications Activities—Although most communications activities received very positive marks, a review of the remarks provided by stakeholders regarding three communications activities provided insight into improvements that could be made. These three activities/tools were the Public Reading Rooms, Quarterly Public Meetings, and the annual Open House.

Where feedback from the survey had a direct impact on communications strategies, text boxes have been inserted to highlight the stakeholders' concerns. The accompanying text indicates the revision in communications activities that resulted from stakeholders' concerns.

► ***Media Coverage***

A review of the WVDP media coverage in the first six months of this fiscal year revealed a limited number of media contacts. This was primarily due to the fact that the media was kept informed of Project progress, and “business as usual” isn’t generally considered newsworthy by news editors.

In the second half of the fiscal year, as work shifted towards projects that will transition the project from vitrification operations to long-term site cleanup and closure activities, specific efforts were made to heighten media coverage. This effort led to increased media coverage of new project cleanup preparations, culminating in extensive coverage of our contaminated groundwater remediation project on the north plateau. And we have taken advantage of each media opportunity, regardless of topic, to communicate the message that long-term site cleanup/closure decisions are pending.

► ***Open House***

*Survey Input* - Stakeholders noted that more encompassing tours of the site during Open House would be beneficial for the public in understanding some of the long-term site management challenges.

Upon consideration of declining attendance at the annual Open House, the focus was shifted away from the traditional approach, which primarily addressed local community members. The concept was refocused toward connecting the already successful community and the educational outreach activities to create a new package to deliver the Project’s messages. The result was a very successful two-day event in early May that attracted more than 1,200 visitors. The event met the needs of both the general public and schools and extended the Project’s reach to communities and schools outside our usual outreach base.

► ***Visits by Elected Officials***

Recognizing the Project’s need for collaborative support from federal and state-elected officials, we intensified our efforts to raise their level of awareness about the Project. This was accomplished through site visits, not only by officials

from this district, but officials from adjacent districts as well. The following elected officials have visited the WVDP:

- May 4 US Congressman Amo Houghton
- Staffer for US Senator Daniel Moynihan
- July 30 New York State (NYS) Senator Pat McGee
- NYS Assemblyman Dan Burling and staff
- NYS Assemblywoman Catherine Young
- August 18 Staffers for Congressman Houghton and Senators Moynihan and Hollings
- August 25 US Congressman Jack Quinn and staff

Additionally, since Congressman Quinn's visit, he has assigned Ron Hayes to act as a liaison between the Congressman's office and the WVDP.

On a local level, the Public and Employee Communications department has participated in both the West Valley and Springville Chambers of Commerce. Participation in the Springville Chamber of Commerce has increased significantly.

► ***Visits by DOE Officials***

On March 17, Jim Turi, DOE-Headquarters attended a Citizen Task Force meeting to introduce DOE's "vision" for site cleanup activities. This presentation was provided at the request of the CTF for feedback from DOE on the CTF's recommendations. Feedback from CTF members indicated that they appreciated the effort by DOE to keep the CTF informed of the direction DOE is taking during this difficult decision-making period.

On May 4, 1999, Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson visited the site. Stakeholders were invited to listen to the Secretary's remarks, and came away with the impression that senior DOE management is listening to stakeholder concerns and considering those concerns in the decision-making process. During that same visit, Secretary Richardson committed to completing the negotiations between DOE and New York State over future project responsibility.

A month later, on June 21, the new Ohio Field Office Manager, Susan Brechbill, met with stakeholders during a visit to the WVDP. This continued senior management attention reinforces stakeholders' confidence in DOE.

► ***Tribal Relations***

Progress has also been made in work with the Seneca Nation of Indians. Recent communications successes include the completion of radioactive waste transportation orientation sessions. This activity was included in the Cooperative Agreement between DOE and the Seneca Nation to examine the possibility of shipping radioactive waste across Seneca lands.

► ***Quarterly Public Meetings***

*Survey Input*—A number of comments were received that more information and communication emphasis should be placed on long-term waste and facility management challenges.

In the past couple of years, topics addressed at the Quarterly Public Meetings focused on updating the public about vitrification design, construction, and operation. Based on feedback identified in the stakeholder survey, topics for the more recent meetings have refocused on EIS-related messages.

► ***Educational Outreach***

This is an area in which the WVDP has always excelled. In addition to the traditional school tours and presentations, the Project supports several educational outreach activities.

Mentoring Program

One-on-one mentoring sessions between Project employees and local elementary and middle school students. On average, more than 30 employees participate.

Horizons Program

Work/study program for seniors from three area high schools that provides real life work experience to students.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)

Since 1995, the WVDP has actively recruited students from HBCUs to participate in the summer student program.

Buffalo Engineering Awareness for Minorities (BEAM)

This organization has been supported by the Project through the traditional means of providing tours and presentations, but also by providing technical advisors. A Human Resources representative is on the BEAM Board.

### Buffalo Elementary School of Technology (BEST)

Two years ago, the WVDP adopted an elementary school in the city of Buffalo. In addition to supplying technical advisors and providing tours and presentations about the WVDP, employees have participated in *Teacher for a Day* and *Career Day*.

### DOE Academic Achievement Awards

Each year, DOE presents awards to students from three area schools who demonstrate excellence in the study of science, for a total of 12 awards. This year the awards were presented to students by Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson.

### Liaisons with Universities

The University of Buffalo played a major role in the development of a permeable treatment wall that was recently installed to stem the flow of contaminated groundwater at the site. UB members performed extensive testing on how the barrier material will perform.

A new relationship with St. Bonaventure University is under development. The WVDP will help sponsor outreach and recognition efforts for St. Bonaventure's School of Journalism and Mass Communication in return for public relations and communications consulting services for the WVDP. Additionally, in the next several months, plans are underway to establish a similar relationship with Buffalo State.

### ► ***Public Reading Files***

*Survey Input*—Stakeholders that had used the reading files suggested that reorganizing the documents might assist individuals in locating information more easily.

The Public Reading files were reorganized, labeled and an updated directory was developed. Additional EIS-related documents will be added to the Reading Rooms as they become available.

### ► ***Community Citizenship***

Considering the small site population, the spirit of giving to the community is immense. When the annual Food Drive began in 1989, Project personnel donated 665 pounds of food for local food pantries. In November 1998, that

level was raised to 43,840 pounds—more than 22 tons of food. That donation helped feed 677 families in our region. United Way participation has also steadily increased over the years. Last year WVDP employees contributed \$94,000 to the United Way, an increase of 7 percent.

In the past, the WVDP has attended both the West Valley and Springville Chambers of Commerce, but over the past year, WVDP participation in the Springville Chamber of Commerce has increased significantly. As a member of the Springville Chamber Board, a WVDP representative led a campaign to raise funds for the area Christmas lights, successfully raising more than five thousand dollars.

The prime contractor, Westinghouse, was sold to Morrison Knudsen this past summer. This activity, which could have had significant on the Project and on outreach activities, was completed seamlessly.

## SUMMARY

Although current communications strategies seem to be working, we must continue to guard against benign neglect—in other words, we need to be careful not to assume a false sense of security.

With that in mind, we're going to continue doing the community outreach activities that have worked for us in the past such as Quarterly Public Meetings, Open House, educational outreach, tours and presentations. But as the Project nears decision-making regarding site cleanup and closure, we will pursue opportunities and apply innovative methods for communicating the Project's messages and developing strong community relationships and support.